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ABSTRACT

The "Hamilton College community" (New York) is a term which appears to describe those who are students or staff of the college, who are bound by the close housing (set up on a hill, to be further separated), who share a common philosophy (wanting to learn or to teach), and who are familiar with many members of the "community." According to the specifications found in the definition of "community" in Webster's dictionary, Hamilton qualifies as a community. At Hamilton all students are required to live on campus. Since the size of the school is so small, people see the same faces every day. However, although people become familiar with faces, they do not necessarily feel more comfortable with those that they see often. Still, there are noticeable common trends which often translate into capital and unify a majority of the campus. Products (clothing, cars, stereos, TVs) represent symbolic capital: J. Crew, Patagonia, Range Rover, all make a statement about the persons who own them, and connect a large population (community) at Hamilton. Where the community aspect seems to negate itself is that power remains with the Trustees and the President, not with the students who make up the majority of the community. Hamilton College fits the lexical definition of "community," but the term is thrown around often in official documents making it difficult to know where the limits are. The residence halls function in a hierarchy of importance and hold members of the general community and many in-group members who have their own speech habits and special language, "in-group talk." Community is, from the students' point of view, something which occurs naturally and even without the guidance of administrators or employees like Resident Advisors (RAs). (NKA)

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Imagined Community at Hamilton College and in the Residence Halls

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"Hamilton is a coeducational, residential liberal arts community whose members value and seek intellectual and cultural diversity. Hamilton is, above all, an academic community in which challenging intellectual work is the main focus." (page 5 of Hamilton College Catalogue) The term 'community' is used twice in this excerpt which describes the Hamilton College community as imagined by the administration. This view of the community is not often identical to that of the students. The statement, "Hamilton recognizes that students develop intellectually and socially while participating as active members of a residential community" (p. 45). portrays a more realistic picture of the Hamilton College experience from the student's perspective.

The "Hamilton College community" is a term which I believe describes those who are students or staff of the college, who are bound by the close housing (set up on a hill, to be further separated), are share a common philosophy (wanting to learn or to teach) and who are familiar with many members of the 'community.'

The definition of 'community' according to Webster's Dictionary is,

> "com.mu.ni.ty \k*-'myu:-n*t-e-\ n [ME comunete, fr. MF comunete`, fr. L communitat-, commun]itas, fr. communis 1: a unified body of individuals : as 1a: STATE, COMMONWEALTH 1b: the people with *common interests living in a particular area*; broadly : the area itself 1c: an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a *common location* 1d: a group of people with a *common characteristic or interest living together* within a larger society 1e: a *group linked by a common policy* 1f: a body of *persons or nations having a history* or social, economic, and political *interests in common* 2: society at large 3a: *joint ownership or participation* 3b: LIKENESS 3c: FELLOWSHIP 3d: a social state or condition"
> (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary p 233, italics added)

According to many of the above specifications, Hamilton qualifies as a community. First, "people with *common interests living in a particular are*"translates to a group of persons, aged 17-

22, with the interest of being students: studying at a small liberal arts college, here Hamilton, to earn a Bachelor's degree and to further their education. Most often their goal is related to succeeding in the workplace and receiving more money, with the help of a degree from Hamilton (which equals prestige and power and monetary capital - Bourdieu). Students also have the common interest of studying at a residential school, which is rated highly in the stratified system of college ratings This carries capital, before as well as in the workplace, and in climbing the (corporate) ladder, to positions with higher prestige.

Second, "people with a *common characteristic or interest living together*...in a *common location*" ties into the residential quality of Hamilton College. All applicants and entering students know that they will be living in residence halls (mandatory) during their stay at Hamilton College, and will be living with, or in close proximity to other students: sharing rooms, bathrooms, and halls. Even the residence halls (which are few - only 21 and small, therefore further bonding the members) are close to each other, furthering the concept of a *close* community (common location). Due to the Residential Life Decision, of which the goal was for the "Integration of Academic and Residential Life," all students are required to live on campus. It will take a few years to accommodate for the large number of students, so for now there are approximately 80 students allowed to live off-campus. The idea here is once again to unite the campus as a community, through the common living situations and proximity. These students also share the common characteristic of being good students; their grades, scores, or activities were high enough to qualify them for admittance into Hamilton College, and their goal is to graduate (as part of Hamilton College Class of 2000, for example).

Since the size of the school is so small, people see the same people everyday and are more apt to feel comfortable with those people (who become familiar). In practice, this is not the true picture. People become familiar with faces, but do not necessarily feel more comfortable with

those that they see often (for instance, on the path or Martins' Way). In fact, often once people begin to get to know each other more, closer ties form between groups (cliques, or sub-communities, such as fraternities or sororities or just recognizable groups of friends), and members are recognized as being members of that groups and are often judged, or shunned due to their membership or association.

Even though Hamilton is such a small school, it is impossible for everyone to know everyone else. As hard as we resident advisors may try, it is often not even possible for all of the residents of a residence hall or of a floor to get to know each and every other member before the semester is over. "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson p. 6). This is why Hamilton is an *imagined* community (assuming that the justifications for community will be satisfactory): because we may never know or meet other members of the community.

There are noticeable common trends which often translate into capital and unify a majority of the campus. Products (clothing, cars, technical equipment such as computers, stereos, TVs, etc.) represent symbolic capital (Bourdieu), and these products are everywhere: J. Crew, Patagonia, Saab, Range Rover and other 4-wheel drive vehicles all make a statement about the persons who have them, and connect a large population (community) at Hamilton. Further, we make the assumption that we are community through our name itself; we are named as a community: the Hamilton College *Continentals*.

Third, "a *group linked by a common policy*" in this instance refers to the rules and regulations of Hamilton College which residents (students, part of the 'group') must abide by and which link them together. Some of these include general school rules, as listed in the catalogue,

such as the Honor Code, (which is unique to only a few small liberal arts colleges like Hamilton), and those recently implemented, such as the Residential Life Decision and its resulting concrete effects, such as the Common Meal, and some are specific to the residence hall. The "Common Meal" in itself, serves to, "build community and increase interaction among faculty and students." (Res. Life Decision Intro. Letter p. 3) This intended for the student body and the faculty to form a more unified community. There are other ways in which the administration has forced this imagined community, through supposed community-building measures. For example, the campus physically has become more pedestrian, so that not only can fewer students commute to campus, but they can only park in a few (designated) areas, far from classrooms or residence halls. Other ways include the new Residence Hall Councils, which would "further develop community within the residence halls" (Residential Life decision p. 13).

Next, regarding "body of *persons or nations having a history*," Hamilton College cannot be defined as a nation, but we (as a 'community') have a history which is written on the webpage, in the front of the catalogue, and any other place where outsiders would have access to information. Hamilton is also a community because of its history: since it builds on its history through connections. The career center connects current students and recent graduates with older graduates to further them in their careers. The whole idea of networking builds off of the community aspect of Hamilton, in which members who have never met are willing to help out fellow Hamiltonians simply because of their membership in the (same) community.

Finally, "*joint ownership or participation*" as the last part of the definition is certainly applicable, since we pay (over $28,000!) to be a member of this community as a student! Students are also expected to participate in the community in the classroom, through extra-curricular activities, through community building (being a leader in the community), and general participation

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(having a say at the college since one has ownership).

The hierarchy of Hamilton College, from the Trustees, to the President, down the line to the students, who are at the bottom, brings up a power issue. Bourdieu writes about power issues which come through via monetary and symbolic capital. In this instance, the administration shapes, guides, and enforces this ideal/imagined community which they envision, through orientation and other activities. The community aspect seems to negate itself here, in that the power remains with the Trustees and the President, not with the students, who make up the majority of the community. It is typical, where the few, the rich and powerful, control the many, the poor (in that they do not have enough money to control the school, whereas the trustees are entrusted with the money and power - symbolic and monetary capital), the weak.

This became obvious when the Trustees announced their decision on March 4, 1995. According to the Trustees decision, "The Committee believes that residential colleges are *special communities* because they provide unique environments that encourage learning to occur formally and informally wherever students, faculty, and staff members encounter one another" (Implementation, p. 8). This opposed the general opinion of the students at the time of the decision, but the Board of Trustees holds the power, so it was within their right to make a decision which would be for the common good of the student body and 'Hamilton Community.'

Hamilton College fits the lexical definition of "community," but the term is thrown around often in official documents (documents in print, put out by the college) such as the Course Catalogue (handbook). Examples of 'community' which appear in the Hamilton College Catalogue include the following: WHCL, community radio station, Community Council of the Student Assembly, Latino community and the multicultural life of the community.

There are many references in the catalogue to the "Hamilton College community." The following are several examples: "Members of the *Hamilton community* have access to

services...and network that provides *members of the Hamilton community* with access to electronic communication" (p. 9) "A written thesis is required at the close of the fellowship year, along with a public lecture to *the College community*" (p. 11) "A few prizes recognize personal character or service to the *College community*." (p. 28) "All members of the *College community* are encouraged to follow sound safety practices." (p. 45) Womyn's Community Center - "The Womyn's Community Center was founded in order to provide a focus for the concerns of women at Hamilton. It operates a resource center and sponsors programs open to all *members of the College community*" (p. 47) "Student Activities supports the academic mission of the College by working to create experiential learning options outside of the classroom and encouraging students to actively participate in the greater *educational community*" (p. 47) "Each year the Student Dance Alliance sponsors a variety of workshops open to *all members of the community* regardless of skill level." (p. 49) "The College and Community Oratorio Society... is open to *any member of the community*" (p. 50) "Numerous lectures and live performances are provided during the year for *the Hamilton community*..." (p. 51) "The fitness center provides high-quality exercise facilities to all members of *the Hamilton community*" (p. 53) "An intramural handbook is published annually and is available to *all members of the community*." (p. 53) "Hamilton College is a coeducational, *residential liberal arts community* whose members value and seek intellectual and cultural diversity" (back cover) and

> "Despite periodic suggestions to the contrary, life on campus is the "real world" for our students and community members...The staff in the Counseling and Psychological Services seeks to assist *community members* in dealing with these issues and developments in day to day life....A crisis is defined as a situation in which a person's usual coping patterns and mechanisms seem inadequate to effectively deal with the level of stress experienced, or one which requires an immediate response to *safeguard the well-being of the community*." (Hamilton College Counseling Center Webpage) (italics added)

In these references to the "Hamilton (or College) Community," and of the members thereof, there is never mention of what constitutes a member, or who is entitled to those services provided for the community; so what is the limit: the boundary? In the staff handbook, the administration solves this problem by using the term "staff members," and including their spouses and immediate family ("dependent children") in the term "community." The Hamilton College community may be bound by that definition, but where does the community end when we speak of "(The College and Community Oratorio Society is open to) *any member of the community*?" In this instance the community obviously extends beyond the actual students and employees of the college, but where does it end? What does the local community mean? These questions are subjective, cannot necessarily be answered.

Residence Halls

The governance of residence halls, includes the Office of Residential Life: Residence Hall Council, student (non-RA) representatives, and Resident Advisors. One way in which Hamilton College tries to shape and enforce community is through The Office of Residential Life, and more specifically the Residential Advisors. As an RA, I reviewed my manual, my job description, and the college catalogue in reference to my job. The simplest statement concerning the purpose of RAs (in respect to community) is as follows: "Under the supervision of an Area Coordinator, and ultimately the Dean of Students, the Resident Advisor is the primary facilitator of the development of the residence hall community" - RA job description.

The other disguised description includes: "Resident advisers, who are upperclass students trained as counselors, limit-setters, program developers and resource persons, provide valuable leadership within the residential community" and "(Residential Managers) assist with community

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development and facility management" (Hamilton College Catalogue, p. 46). RAs have also been encouraged to discontinue using the term "dorm," and replace it with "residence hall." This conjures up a more 'homey' less militaristic/prison-like picture and allows for a more pleasant understanding of what home is here.

In addition to the resident advisors, the Office of Residential Life includes the director, 3 area coordinators, and a staff assistant. According to the catalogue, "The staff of the Residential Life Office strives to promote and maintain a *residence hall community* conducive to intellectual and personal growth, where students can sleep and study, and share ideas with peers whose culture, lifestyle and opinions may be very different from their own" (Catalogue p. 46) and "The Residential Life Program is designed to facilitate the personal, social, and academic growth of students by integrating the goals of liberal education into a community living environment."

ACs communicate with RAs through oral (RA meeting = speech act), E-mail, and written medium (such as our weekly newsletter, FYI) in which those above the RAs give ideas on how to further the development of the (residential and college) community. Further examples of written medium include the RA manual and book we received at training and daily e-mail messages we receive of notices and reminders. In the greeting RA letter from the Director of Residential Life, RAs "Wear many hats:' as community builder, programmer, advisor, limit setter, and administrator." We are trained to build community, and many of our routine activities meet this goal. Our role as programmer is to unify the floors and halls (so they feel as if they are part of a larger community). Our role as advisor, counselor, and mediator is to solve problems/disputes between residents so the spirit of community is maintained. Our role as limit setter is to confront situations which upset that which is for the community's well being (the 'common good'). All of our roles are to build and strengthen community, so residents will take pride in their homes,

respect their fellow residents, and not disturb the community.

How is each resident the North (Residence Hall) community socialized into the culture of the community as a whole and per floor? How does one become a recognized member of the community? There appears to be an imagined community in North Residence Hall, based on the general rules and binding qualities of Hamilton College, and based on North's special rules, such as being the Smoke-Free Community, having special quiet hours, and being a mostly freshman dorm.

> "*Smoke-Free Community* is designed to ensure a smoke-free living environment where residents will *actively participate* in lifestyles and activities that support the smoke-free *philosophy*. As a *resident of the Smoke-Free Community*, I agree to make a positive personal commitment to *maintain the community norms and values as established by Hamilton College*. Evidence of this commitment shall be through my participation at floor programs/activities, as well as managing my own behavior and confronting others' inappropriate behavior as it relates to smoking....Failure to comply with the above policies may result in disciplinary action and/or removal from *the Smoke-Free Community*." (Smoke-Free Community contract) (italics added)

The definition of smoke free community refers to participating actively (definition of community), sharing a common philosophy (community), "maintain the community norms and values" which all seem to fit the definition of community. Here, although it is specifically referred to as a community, it is imagined by Hamilton College ("as established by Hamilton College") and is enforced by employees (RAs) and the form it specific to the administration, not the students.

The quiet hours demonstrate the problem of RAs having the power, but giving the illusion that in this 'community,' all have an equal say (as all should, in a community). However, when all the residents (members of the community) met to discuss and vote on quiet hours, the overwhelming consensus from the first year residents was not to have quiet hours. The

implementation was a decision of the RAs, but to give the residents a sense of power ("self governance") and equality in the community, all residents were invited to the meeting, but since their vote went against the common good, the RAs had to overrule it. This raises the question, "To be a true community, should everyone have a say and equal representation, and so if not equal, is it not a community?"

North is not only bonded (as an imagined community) by its special rules, but by the social aspect which is unique to North, and the open attitude which can be seen in socializing in the halls, and in the great amount of "Broadcast" transmission which occurs between North residents on their computers. *["Broadcast" transmits 3-lined messages over the internet, which appear immediately and interrupt whichever program is currently in use (unlike E-mail, which only checks for messages if it is open) and calls for immediate responses]. In fact, recent technology has made it possible (or even forced) for the entire Hamilton College campus to be an imagined community, through an on-line common bond, since use of the internet by all is now required. (Some members of the 'Hamilton College Community' even have webpages which link off of the Hamilton College webpage.) The internet has certainly bonded us (especially the newer members of the community) in a new and unique way, as evident from all of the resources we must look to the Hamilton College Homepage to get (such as the Class of 2000 facebook).

North is imagined as a community by the administration because it is a "Smoke-Free Community," so it is already designated a community, and simply because it is a residence hall. However, to its residents, North is imagined as a community because everyone knows almost everyone else in the residence hall (or tries to get to know each other), and because the atmosphere is a friendly and familiar one. Most everyone seems to be a recognized member of the community, simply because they live in the building, but there are those who are recognized but not always welcomed as members. Those "outcasts" often fall into the category of "counter community" or

eventually end up moving out (of the building and of the community) because they do not feel like a member of the community.

To most of the first years, because they are the majority (88 out of 112 = 79%), they feel bonded as a group - a separate community. They qualify as an imagined community in the technical sense of being a member of the (community) "Class of 2000," as designated by the administration, which was brought together through activities which shaped their community from the first minute they arrived on campus. Such activities include orientation (led by Hamilton College-trained Orientation Leaders) and "First Night experience," which was led by the (Res. Life) - trained Resident Advisor staff.

The "Class of 2000" brings in various types of habitus, from many different cultures (and religions) and from many different areas of the country and of the world. Since Hamilton is imagined by the administration to be a growing into a more diverse community, the habitus should be growing more diverse as well, but this does not seem to be the case. Students bring different habitus based on their upbringing and past educational experience; they bring unique speech and physical mannerisms, values and other habits instilled in them by their parents/guardians or friends. This habitus is built upon if and when students go off to boarding schools, because their social relations are altered again, by those with with they live. Due to the residential lifestyle here, often these different ideas are shared and discussed, and many aspects of one's habitus blend with parts of others' habitus.

This is true of speech patterns, especially as indicative of imagined community. North Hall probably acts as a separate speech community, but I have observed the fourth floor: not the dorm as a whole, in terms of speech community. The fourth floor (all female) is concentrated with freshmen; there are 22 freshmen and 6 upperclassmen residents (including the resident advisor). A

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few of the females have a dominant speech pattern, which carries over into the speech patterns of their friends, so it seems as if there is a speech community based on a few common words. Noticeable examples of these include: "Yikes, 'Shpanks' (= thanks), 'I shpank not' (= I think not), and Chickens." The speech community exists, but it is mainly among a small number of people, and therefore does not involve everyone, so it results in variations: a sub-community and a counter-community.

On the fourth floor of North, when a member of the "in-group" uses "in-group talk," it is acceptable, but if a student who is not a member of that sub community uses "in-group talk," (which she most likely would not even think of doing), she is looked at with disdain, as if "how dare she think of herself as part of our group, since such talk is unique to our group." This language is therefore also used as symbolic capital. The use of "in-group talk" signals membership in a community (or sub-community), (here imagined through common use of language), which carries symbolic capital to those inside and outside of the group.

Membership in such an imagined community is not only recognized through (spoken) language. As previously mentioned, one could still use this special language if one were not a member of said community, (it would be looked down upon, but it could still be used, so perhaps the reaction of in-group members would be enough to signal the presence of an out-group member). Key words or phrases typical of the in-group (or dominant imagined community) are not the only indication of in-group membership. Deviation to a counter-community or sub-community appears in both oral and written form. I noted an example of the written form after putting up blank paper on the back of the bathroom stalls and noting the responses from the women. I could recognize much of the handwriting, and the members of the in-group (the dominant community) were the ones who replied most often, and replied to each other. This

strengthened them, because they addressed issues there which they did not feel as comfortable discussing in speech, in person.

Meanwhile, the members of the counter community seemed to have their own random comments, which often were responded to by members of their group, or in outstanding situations (for example, if the comment were too outrageous to ignore), would receive comments from those in the dominant community. I once observed a member of the general community write down the word "chicken" on her room's holiday decoration, and when a member of the in-group saw this, she said, "Hey! They can't write that! They're not chickens - we are!" This illustrates the association with words and language with variations in community and in-group - out-group relations.

North Residence Hall is an imagined community, probably more ideally imagined by the administration than by the students, but one of the strongest imagined communities in a residence hall on campus today. This is fostered by the four resident advisors in the building, myself being one of them. We are trained (in RA training and from the first day we arrived on campus freshman year) to think that we are a part of a large community here - that of Hamilton College, and that we should build on that community; improve it and take control of it. However, we are members of many communities, and our membership in these imagined communities is what shapes them: not just the goals and desires of the administration, but the goals and desires of the students. The notion of community at Hamilton has negative connotations due to the fact that it is often forced by the administration, and thrown around too loosely and too often, without specifics. Community is, in fact, something which occurs naturally and even without the guidance of administration or employees like RAs. After seeing the community and relationships within that which develop, I am glad to be part of the shaping of the imagined community of North Residence Hall and Hamilton College.

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http://www.hamilton.edu:8001/html_s/personnel/generalinfo/handbooks.html

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